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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 000831

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DEPT FOR D, INR/R/MR, I/RW, I/REC; PA
SA/INS (FOR JWALLER); SA.PD (FOR LJIRWIN, LSCENSNY,
WREINCKENS); SSA/PAB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KPAO OPRC KMDR OIIP CE

SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: Assistant Secretary Christina Rocca
May 11-14 Sri Lanka Visit

¶1. Summary: The media received Assistant Secretary Christina Rocca's May 11-14 visit to Sri Lanka positively and interpreted her visit as further indication of international support for the Island's peace process. English, Sinhala and Tamil television coverage of Rocca's visit was extensive. Major English and vernacular newspapers headlined her remarks regarding cohabitation and encouraging the LTTE to attend the Tokyo donor conference. English editorial comment was muted and focused on cohabitation and sovereignty issues. Tamil editorial reaction was more robust and for the most part agreed with Ms. Rocca's comments regarding cohabitation. Sinhala editorialists remained silent. A transcript of Rocca's May 13 Colombo press conference was picked up by the Washington File, and was also distributed to the English and vernacular Sri Lankan press. In India, the transcript was distributed to Tamil Nadu media outlets. India's English Sun-TV and Tamil channels carried clips of Ms. Rocca's briefing. End summary.

¶2. Television.

English, Sinhala and Tamil television coverage of Rocca's visit was extensive. Independent and government-owned television stations heralded both her arrival on May 11 and her meetings with the President, Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister on May 12. On May 13, post hosted a press conference for Rocca, which was aired by independent and government-owned television stations on lunchtime and evening newscasts in English and vernacular broadcasts.

Indian English Sun-TV and Indian Tamil channels carried clips of Ms. Rocca's briefing.

¶3. Headlines.

Throughout Rocca's visit, major English and vernacular newspapers focused on her comments regarding cohabitation and the LTTE's attendance at the Tokyo donor conference. Independent English DAILY MIRROR headlined (5/15), "US tells UNF and PA to come together." Government-owned English DAILY NEWS wrote (5/14), "Act in unity to achieve peace - Rocca," and (5/15), "Rocca lauds Lankan peace process: US urges LTTE to go to Tokyo." Opposition Sinhala daily, DIVAINA led with (5/14), "In order to make the peace process happen, all political parties get together" announces America." Independent Tamil VIRAKESARI reported (5/15), "'LTTE should definitely attend the Tokyo Conference- Cohabitation between President and Prime Minister necessary' - says Christina Rocca."

Regarding her 5/12 meeting with President Kumaratunga, independent English DAILY MIRROR (5/14) reported, "CBK complains to US against LTTE and govt. This was echoed by opposition Sinhala daily DIVAINA (5/15), "Christina Rocca is informed of MOU violations of LTTE." The Tamil press was predictably silent.

¶4. English editorials.

English editorial comment was muted and focused on cohabitation and sovereignty issues.

---- Under the headline, "The spirit of Vesak and the spirit of the constitution," opposition English daily ISLAND (5/15) warned, ".foreign donors .consider co-habitation quarrels will eclipse peace negotiations."

Excerpts:

"While Sri Lankans and the world outside hoped that some form of compromise could be reached between the prime minister and president over an issue that is not as contentious as many other issues before them, the president's resounding reply (my decision remains unchanged and valid) has dashed hopes of a settlement and deepened the political crisis.

"At yesterday's press briefing by America's key official to the South Asian region, Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca, she spoke of two challenges that are

particularly worrying: `One the possibility that the LTTE may ignore the donor conference in Tokyo; two the possibility that cohabitation quarrels will eclipse peace talk deliberations'. The reference made to is quite obvious and if the president pursues with her intended moves it could well lead to paralysis of government, dissolution of parliament and threaten the 'Peace Process'.

"Despite President Kumaratunga's cavalier dismissal of charges of jeopardising the 'Peace Process', as pointed out earlier in our comments, foreign donors do consider co-habitation quarrels will eclipse peace negotiations. Indeed even before the lotteries board issue, there were far greater co- habitation issues that had to be resolved if peace was to come about. But if this seemingly less innocuous issue is to take us further down into the mire, it will probably take this 'Peace Process' along with it."

---- Under the headline, "Erosion of sovereignty," independent English DAILY MIRROR commented (5/16), "But for our head of state. to obsequiously place her domestic problems before a visiting representative of another sovereign state, is tantamount not only to putting the country's sovereignty to ridicule but to bringing disgrace to the honour and dignity of the office she holds."

Excerpts:

"The extent of the erosion of our country's sovereignty could be judged from the fact that it has become necessary for our head of state to complain to an outsider against the government's alleged harassment of her party activists and supporters and about other domestic problems.

"The President has lodged this complaint about the LTTE's ceasefire violations and about 3,000 incidents of assault, arson and battery against PA activists and supporters following the December 2001 general election and regarding police inaction over these incidents, when US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca met the President on

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Tuesday.

"It would indeed be a different matter if these parties took their woes and disputes to international institutions specifically set up for the resolution of such conflicts. But for our head of state who wields extensive executive powers, to obsequiously place her domestic problems before a visiting representative of another sovereign state, is certainly tantamount not only to putting the country's sovereignty to ridicule but to bringing disgrace to the honour and dignity of the office she holds."

14. Vernacular editorials.

Tamil editorial comment was more robust. For the most part, Tamil editorials incorporated Ms. Rocca's remarks into their own editorial messages, encouraging the government to overcome its cohabitation problems. Sinhala editorialists remained silent.

---- Under the headline, "Christina Rocca's timely expressions," independent Tamil daily, THINAKKURAL commented (5/15) that "...The government, opposition, President and the Liberation Tigers should take note of the views expressed by . Rocca at a time when the peace process is facing many challenges." Excerpts:

"...The government, opposition, President and the Liberation Tigers should take note of the views expressed by the US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca at a time when the peace process is facing many challenges.

"Tiger participation at the Tokyo Aid Conference is uncertain. At the same time a new political crisis between the President and the Prime Minister has emerged.

"These two issues may bring an end to national peace. The political forces should get together and put an end to such disputes.

"Christina Rocca has said that it is important that the political forces apply the correct approach and settle these two issues if Sri Lanka is to prosper in the future within a peaceful environment. All those trying to show their muzzles should bear this in mind."

---- Under the headline, "Disputes and Aid," Independent Tamil daily, VIRAKESARI (5/16) echoed Rocca's comments and wrote: "If all these parties fail to raise a common voice the full quota of the anticipated aid may not reach Sri Lanka." Excerpts:

"American voice is again heard that Sri Lanka should take

care of the peace talks to achieve lasting peace. The US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Ms. Christina Rocca has made this comment.

"Her voice at this stage, when the talks are faced with many obstacles, is a request to the President, Prime Minister and the Tigers to pay attention and proceed in the right direction. ...

"... While commenting that the recent actions of the President and the use of her executive powers are connected to internal affairs of Sri Lanka, she said that the international community is very much interested regarding solution to the Sri Lankan ethnic problem and lasting peace in Sri Lanka.

"The US government has always said that the participation of the President at the peace talks is very vital. This has been stressed this time too. She has stressed that the President and the Prime minister should solve the disputes between them amicably and should work together to find a solution to the ethnic problem.

"The Aid Conference to be held in Tokyo, Japan in June is very important to the government, President, Tigers and the citizens of Sri Lanka. If all these parties fail to raise a common voice the full quota of the anticipated aid may not reach Sri Lanka."

---- Under the headline, "Executive powers that challenge cohabitation," Independent Tamil daily, THINAKKURAL comments (5/16), "The chances of bringing a solution to this problem is far away." Excerpts:

"The government sources, international facilitators and the local political forces working for peace are trying their level best to solve the political crisis between Liberation Tigers and the Sri Lankan government enabling the Tigers to continue with peace talks and attend the Tokyo Aid Conference. The chances of bringing a solution to this problem is far away.

US Assistant Secretary for South Asia Christina Rocca clearly said "should not allow the peace talks with Liberation Tigers to break up and that is the advice the US government can offer"

---- Under the headline, "A good omen," independent Tamil daily, SUDAR OLI commented (5/16): Finally [the US] has understood that whenever the government wants to fulfill the aspirations of the Tamils the racists in the opposition always try to stop such a move." Excerpts:

"Although many of them are customary statements as the international policeman, one of here views show that the US has understood something they refused to understand in the past.

"The ethnic problem in Sri Lanka has along history of more than five decades. During that period many Tamil leaders wanted to find solutions for their problems in a peaceful manner. But every time they tried to win the rights of the Tamil people, the Sinhalese leaders who were in power fooled them."

"When the Tamil people became convinced that their demands could not be won through peaceful negotiations, they had to start an armed struggle."

"All this time, the US government did not understand or rather did not want to understand the basic reasons for the armed struggle of the Tamils. Finally they have understood that whenever the government wants to fulfill the aspirations of the Tamils the racists in the opposition always try to stop such a move."

"... Therefore she has warned the President and the Prime Minister not to allow the peace talks to break off."

Wills